

# Manure Management Plans and CSP

The Conservation Security Program (CSP) was intended to reward farmers for resource management on working lands, but after he filled out the paperwork for CSP this past spring, Mike Bravard, Jefferson, isn't sure exactly what that means.

"I thought I was being a good manager by using manure for corn production," he says. "I have a manure management plan that specifies how and where I'll use manure. I also use a late spring nitrate nitrogen test to help fine tune nitrogen fertilizer applications and make sure I'm producing as much and as economically as I can." (See graph on p. 8)

There are incentives in the USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service Environmental Quality Improvement Program in Greene County that pay for the nitrogen testing. Where Bravard used manure and followed up with the nitrogen test, he often found he could bump yields by applying another 50 lbs. of nitrogen at sidedressing. He's even conducted strip trials through the ISA On-Farm Network™ that confirm this need. This is in contrast to nitrogen fertilizer trials that demonstrated a much lower rate than the manure trials.

The problem was, where he followed up the test with additional nitrogen after applying manure, NRCS disqualified the fields for CSP because, they say, he overapplied nitrogen. "None of the fields where I'd used manure in the past two years qualified," he says.

"There seems to be some inconsistency here," says Dr. Tracy Blackmer, Iowa Soybean Association director of research. "Everyone

agrees that what Bravard has done with late spring nitrogen tests and subsequent sidedress applications of nitrogen is economically sound. Yet growers who do this may be disqualified from participating in programs designed to reward them.

The data collected show clearly that rates of nitrogen required from fertilizer are significantly less than rates of nitrogen from manure. Accurate guidelines for manure management have not yet been adequately incorporated into government programs due to discrepancies at Iowa State University. However, with implementation of the performance measurements discussed here and mainstreaming the evaluation process, we'll see continued improvement in cooperation between growers and agencies involved.

"The problem, as I see it, is with the manure management plan. In Iowa, growers are required to count 100% of the nitrogen in liquid swine manure as available in the first year," he says. "Our tests in Buttrick Creek last year suggest this is not the case.

"We're continuing this line of study this year and will have more to report at our Nitrogen Conference this winter. In the meantime, let me point out that Iowa alone in the Midwest assumes 100% availability of the nitrogen in manure. In other states, growers are allowed to apply at higher rates based on 50 to 80% nitrogen availability. And, in our plots last year, we determined that only about 60% of the nitrogen in the manure we applied was available to the crop," Blackmer says.

## Farm Environmental Management

Many farmers like Mike Bravard discovered that what they believed was good management of nitrogen and manure actually disqualified some or all of a farm for the Conservation Security Program (CSP).

Most will be able to enroll some of their land and by cutting back on per acre manure application rates, should be able to qualify those questionable fields at a later date.

"What this brings to light is the need to understand how what's reasonable in crop production management is affected by the aspects of crop production that are now regulated," says Tracy Blackmer, Iowa Soybean Association director of research.

Bravard and many other Iowa farmers who have already been through the CSP application process have learned that Nutrient Management Plans and Manure Management Plans just can't stand on their own when it comes to qualifying for the highest tiers of CSP. And in a few cases, what was thought to be good nitrogen management can even prevent qualification for Tier I.

### So what's a farmer to do?

In many industries, the response to environmental regulation has been to adopt an Environmental Management System (EMS), which documents how well the various aspects of the business are being managed with respect to the potential environmental impact.

Heath Ellison, an ISA agricultural environmental specialist, says the association, through its watershed and environmental programs, has developed Certified Environmental Management Systems for Agriculture (CEMSA) to simplify the process of writing an EMS for Iowa farmers.

"In developing the CEMSA program we have incorporated NRCS standards and guidance. We can help an operation determine if an incentive program is appropriate for that operation and what actions can be taken to improve their chances of qualifying," Ellison says.

Farmers who hope to apply for CSP in the future should look at the possibility of implementing an EMS today. The process of documenting crop and livestock production management will help prepare growers to interface with any government programs and regulatory issues.

"CEMSA can help start big picture thinking and motivate action. We use the basic EMS concepts — create a plan, implement it, evaluate it, and improve it — while including the requirements of the NRCS and their conservation planning processes to help farmers improve their business and prepare for government programs," Ellison says.

### Can CEMSA help with CSP?

Dwight Dial, Lake City, a CEMSA participant, farms with his father in the North

Raccoon watershed. Dial encourages other farmers to take a look at CEMSA if they plan to apply for CSP.

"We farm about 1,000 acres in a corn/soybean rotation, run a wean-to-finish operation of about 3,600 pigs per year, and have 100 head of ewes," he tells. "We started looking into CEMSA after reading about it in the Iowa Soybean Review. We knew that CSP would be coming soon in the North Raccoon River watershed, and although we felt that we were a little bit in the dark about it like everyone else, CEMSA seemed like a good way to get everything in order ahead of time."

"Now that we've been through the process, it's our impression that CEMSA put us way ahead of the game with our CSP application. We put our CEMSA plan together and took it along to our CSP proposal and interview. The local NRCS office was so impressed with the work we did that they asked if they could use it while working on our CSP application," Dial reports.

"And that's not to mention what it's done to improve our farming operation. Accurate, usable soil maps are just one example of how the documentation of CEMSA helped. In the past, the rules said you could take soil samples just from the majority or representative soil type on your property. Now that rule has changed - you have to enter all the soil types. So the soil maps that we produced for our CEMSA fit right in."